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The Kennedy assassination: Something rotten. . .

Almost a year ago we published an article by Richard J. Whalen that raised some major questions about the assassination of President Kennedy and demonstrated fairly conclusively that the Warren Commission was wrong. At that time we urged an official reopening of the investigation—not a spectacular public “trial” but a quietly meticulous reexamination of the disputed evidence. We were not alone in this proposal. *Life* magazine, for one, expressed a similar view and, indeed, any number of independent observers who have studied the case have come to the same conclusion.

The results have been virtually nil. It is astonishing, really, that charges of such gravity should produce so little effect. It is charged, to begin with, that a national commission, headed by the Chief Justice of the United States, did a sloppy job, overlooked or distorted important evidence and came to the wrong conclusion. It is charged that Lee Harvey Oswald could not possibly have fired the single bullet 399 through both the President and Governor Connally. It is charged that there may have been other assassins, and the implication is that there was a conspiracy to kill the President, a conspiracy that succeeded not only in committing the murder but in disguising itself so that most of the conspirators went free—and are free to this day. The official answer to all this is that there is no answer. The case is closed.

It is also astonishing that the only official to take any action should be a local district attorney in New Orleans, James Garrison, who claims that he has solved the case and expects to get several convictions based on his solution. Garrison's solution is that there were a half-dozen conspirators, some of them Cuban exiles embittered by Kennedy's failure to overthrow Fidel Castro, some of them simply pathological malcontents. Several skilled reporters, including James Phelan of the *Post*, have looked into Garrison's charges and found them unconvincing, and indeed Garrison's “conspirators” include so many odd and confused characters that it seems hard to believe they could ever carry off a plot of such skill and audacity. On the other hand, Garrison's defenders, among whom the most vociferous is Garrison himself, argue that he is proceeding with a perfectly straightforward prosecution, that the indictments he asked have been

voted by a grand jury, and that he expects to prove his case in court. Perhaps, but we are unable to judge Garrison's case from a distance.

What is clear, however, is that Garrison has received little or no help from officials outside his jurisdiction, and that any suspected conspirator who can avoid the grasp of the New Orleans authorities remains as free as before. In this issue of the *Post* we bring the whole question up again. By publishing a major excerpt from Josiah Thompson's new book, *Six Seconds in Dallas*, we declare once again that we believe the Kennedy mystery has not been solved, that the case is not closed.

It is painful, and even disgusting, to read the clinical details of the President's wounds. It is difficult, and sometimes tedious, to study such technicalities as the Zapruder film and the firing speed of a Mannlicher-Carcano rifle. Many readers—and perhaps many officials, too—react to the whole subject by turning away and trying to avoid it. It is easier to fall back on the knowledge that the Warren Commission consisted of honorable men, and that they would not have done less than the best that could be done. Similarly, if J. Edgar Hoover and the Justice Department treat the case as closed, if the Kennedy family treats the case as closed, what is the point of amateurs and outsiders poking around in the ashes?

One returns, inevitably, to those clinical details, those bits of evidence that seem to have been systematically misread or misinterpreted. For as Thompson analyzes and arrays them, they cry out for the truth to be told and for the murderers to be punished. It has been said too often that Americans cannot face the truth about themselves, about their secret fears and hatreds, about the violence that afflicts their whole society. The reactions to the Kennedy assassination have always illustrated that self-evasion. From the first moment, when we couldn't believe it had happened, to that bizarre moment of Lee Oswald's death in front of the television cameras, when we were in a sense relieved to be rid of him, to the present moment, when every suspicion is shushed up as a violation of the President's memory, we have struggled to avoid the unavoidable question of what actually happened and why. Is the question really too ugly to be raised, or are we just too childish to face reality?